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DID JESUS RISE

THE RESURRECTION FROM THE
VIEW-POINT OF A LAWYER

GEORGE W. GERE



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DID JESUS RISE

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EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION.

From the Point of View of a Lawyer.

THE Christian religion is based chiefly upon the facts of the teachings, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

These facts are related by the evangelists in the gospels, and the fact of the resurrection is recorded by all four of the evangelists.

To those who accept the Bible as a divine revelation of God to man, all that is necessary to establish the fact of the resurrection is to read to them the sacred record. But there are many who do not yet see into the promised land with the eye of faith; many who would willingly believe this great miracle, but to whom all things supernatural are unreal.

The question often recurs: To one who does not believe that the Scriptures are inspired is there any proof of the resurrec-

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tion? Can legal and historical evidence of the resurrection be furnished?

Let us attempt to answer this question as though we had never heard of the Bible, as though we had never read the story of Christ as therein told, as fair, candid, honest seekers after the truth.

First. What can be established by profane history?

Second. Is the Bible admissible in evidence under the rules governing courts of law?

Third. What did the apostles and disciples say concerning the resurrection, and did they act consistently with their teachings?

Fourth. What of the prophecy concerning Christ, and what of its fulfillment?

PROFANE HISTORY.

The testimony which Josephus has given in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVIII, Chapter III, Section III, is familiar to many. It is: "Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him a man, for He was a doer of

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wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to Him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned Him to the cross, those that loved Him at first did not forsake Him, for He appeared alive again to them the third day as the divine prophet had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning Him, and the tribe of Christians, so named from Him, are not extinct to this day."

The rapidity with which the church increased during the lives of the apostles and their immediate successors is further shown by the correspondence which took place between Pliny and Trajan, A. D. 112.

Pliny says: "There are many of every age, of every rank and of both sexes, who are now and hereafter likely to be called to account, and to be in danger, for this superstition is spread like a contagion, not only in cities and towns, but into the country villages also, which yet there is reason to hope may be stopped and corrected. To be

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sure the temples which were almost forsaken begin already to be frequented, and the holy solemnities, which were long intermitted, begin to be revived."

Gibbon, "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," says: "The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews, and the congregation over which they presided united the law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ. It was natural that the primitive tradition of a church, which was founded only forty days after the death of Christ, and was governed almost as many years under the immediate inspection of His apostle, should be received as the standard orthodoxy. The distant churches very often appealed to the authority of their venerable parent, and relieved her distress by a liberal contribution of alms. But when numerous and opulent societies were established in the great cities of the empire, in Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome the reverence which Jerusalem had inspired to all the Christian colonies insensibly diminished. The Jewish converts, or as they were afterwards called, the Nazarines, who had laid the foundation of the church, soon found

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themselves overwhelmed by the increasing multitudes that from all the various religions of Polythesim enlisted under the banner of Christ."

Justin Martyr was born about A. D. 100. He was the son of a wealthy Greek; he was a philosopher of broad culture and while retaining the garb of the philosopher he espoused the cause of Christianity and became one of its ablest advocates. He it was who addressed his two apologies of Christianity to the emperor of Rome, in both of which reference is made to the acts of Pilate, and from one of which I quote: "And that it was foretold that our Christ should heal all diseases and raise the dead. Hear what was said; it was as follows: 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.' That He performed these things you may be easily satisfied from the acts of Pontius Pilate."

Tertullian, one of the most ancient of the Latin fathers, whose works are extant, was born in Carthage, about A. D. 160. His father was a Roman centurion. He was a

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man of large abilities. He was converted to Christianity when he was between the age of thirty and forty years, and at once became its bold and fearless advocate. His apology addressed to the Roman magistracy, A. D. 198, is a strong rebuttal of the charges made against Christianity at that time. He says: "Out of envy Jesus was surrendered by the Jewish ceremonial lawyers to Pilate, and by him after he had yielded to the cries of the people, given over to crucifixion. A guard of Roman soldiers was set at the grave for the purpose of preventing his disciples stealing his body, since he had predicted his resurrection, but on the third day the ground was suddenly shaken, and the stone was rolled away from the sepulchre; in the grave nothing could be found but the articles of burial, and the report was spread abroad by those who stood outside that the disciples had taken the body away. Jesus spent forty days with them in Galilee, teaching them what their mission should be, and after giving them their instructions as to what they should preach he was raised in a cloud to heaven. All this was reported to the emperor—at that time Tiberius—by Pilate."

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Eusebius, the well-known father of ecclesiastical history, was born in Palestine, probably about A. D. 265. He was bishop of Cæsarea, acquiring that office about A. D. 313. There he labored conspicuously until his death, about A. D. 340. Of the acts of Pilate he says: "The fame of our Lord's resurrection and ascension being now spread abroad, according to the ancient custom prevalent among the rulers of the nations, to communicate novel occurrences to the emperor, that nothing might escape him, Pontius Pilate transmits to Tiberius an account of the circumstances concerning the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, the report of which had already been spread throughout all Palestine. In this account he also intimated that he ascertained other miracles respecting him, and that having now risen from the dead, he was believed to be a God by the great mass of the people."

The epistles of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians were read in the primitive church. He was a disciple of Peter and was afterwards bishop of the church of Rome. I Clement XI, 16: "Let us consider, beloved, how the Lord does continually show

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us that there shall be a future resurrection, of which he has made our Lord Jesus Christ the first fruits, raising him from the dead."

The epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, is also printed in the New Testament apocrypha. He says, Philippians IV, II: "And grant unto you a lot and portion among his saints; and us with you, and to all that are under the heavens who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Father who raised him from the dead."

These quotations from contemporary history clearly show that the early church was firmly established in the belief of the resurrection of Christ, and that it was regarded one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

Regarding the rapid spread of Christianity after the resurrection, observe what is said by Eusebius and Tacitus.

Eusebius says: "Thus then under a celestial influence and cooperation the doctrine of the Saviour, like the rays of the sun, quickly irradiated the whole world. Presently, in accordance with divine prophecy, the sound of his inspired evangelists and apostles had gone throughout the earth, and

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their words to the end of the world." This was written of the period between A. D. 37 and 41.

Tacitus, a Roman historian, was born about A. D. 55, and his annals, from which the following extract is taken, appeared about A. D. 110. Tacitus, writing of the persecutions of the Christians by Nero, says: "Hence, to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt and punished with the most exquisite tortures the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius, but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again."

The quotations already presented show that the historians, whether friendly with, or opposed to the Christian religion, are in substantial accord with the record given of the early growth of Christianity as found in the Acts of the Apostles, and that the early church taught and firmly believed in the doctrine of the resurrection.

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THE BIBLE, LEGAL EVIDENCE.

For the sake of convenience and brevity, in the discussion of the question whether the books of the Bible would be admitted in evidence in a legal proceeding, we shall give because of our purpose here specific attention to the gospels. That the text of the four evangelists has been handed down to us in manner and form, letter and spirit, as originally written, without having been materially corrupted or falsified is an admitted fact. The genuineness of these writings is as well sustained by proof as that of any ancient writing. Greenleaf in his "Testimony of the Evangelists," says: "That the books of the Old Testament, as we now have them, are genuine; that they existed in the time of our Saviour, and are commonly received and referred to among the Jews as the sacred books of their religion; and that the text of the four evangelists has been handed down to us in the state in which it was originally written, that is, without having been materially corrupted or falsified either by heretics or Christians, are

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facts which we are entitled to assume as true until the contrary is shown.

The genuineness of these writings really admits of as little doubt, and is susceptible of as ready proof, as that of any ancient writings whatever. The rule of municipal law on this subject is familiar and applies with equal force to all ancient writings, whether documentary or otherwise. Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law assumes to be genuine and devolves on the opposing party the burden of proving it to be otherwise. An ancient document offered in evidence in our courts is said to come from the proper repository when it is found in the place where, and under the care of persons with whom, such writings might naturally and reasonably be expected to be found, for it is this custody which gives authenticity to documents found with it."

The rule of evidence in regard to the credit due to the testimony of witnesses depends, (1) upon their honesty; (2) upon their ability; (3) upon their number and the consistency of their testimony; (4) upon

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the conformity of their testimony with experience; (5) upon the coincidence of their testimony with collateral facts.

WHO WROTE THE GOSPELS?

Matthew was a Galilean Jew. He was a tax gatherer—a publican. His business was the collection of import and export taxes upon persons and property at Capernaum. The business doubtless required skill, tact and ability, care in details. While engaged in this business, which was evidently lucrative, he was called by Jesus to be one of his disciples. He wrote between A. D. 37 and 61.

Mark was a resident of Jerusalem. He was the companion of Peter, and is believed to have written largely for him. He traveled with Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem to Antioch, and subsequently went with Timothy to Rome at the request of Paul. From that city he probably went to Asia, joining Peter. He wrote between A. D. 44 and 64.

Luke, according to Eusebius, was a native of Antioch, by profession a physician. He is believed to have been a Gentile by

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birth, but in early youth to have embraced Judaism. He was a companion of Paul, accompanying him from Cæsarea to Rome, and remaining with him during his two years imprisonment there. His own assertions and the character of his writings prove him to be a thoroughly competent historian of the life of Christ. He was a person of skill, intelligence, education and integrity. He wrote between A. D. 53 and 64.

John was one of the twelve who were with Jesus during his personal ministry. He was favorably known to the high priest who presided at the trial of Jesus. He followed Jesus to the cross. He was first among those who visited the sepulchre on the morning of the resurrection. It is not agreed as to when his gospel was written, some placing the date as early as A. D. 68, and others as late as A. D. 98.

The unprejudiced reader who studies the gospels will be strongly impressed with the idea that the writers were thorough believers in the doctrines which they recorded, and that they were writing the truth. They all record fully the fact of the resurrection. The writers are shown to be honest; they

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are men of ability; their number and the consistency of their testimony is such as entitles them to be believed. All of the writers of the books of the New Testament bear witness to the fact of the resurrection.

Christians everywhere assert that the testimony of these writers is in conformity with Christian experience. The resurrection is an unquestioned article in the creed of Christians. If the fact we are seeking to prove were an ordinary event it would have been so indubitably proven as to be beyond contradiction. But because it is an extraordinary event, and because many regard it as supernatural, it is doubted.

Here and now I would record a protest against this use of the word supernatural, and the purpose for which it is used. Who are we, that by arbitrary rules of our own making, limit the plans, purposes, laws and workings of the infinite God, putting bounds to the natural for him? Shall we, with our finite and imperfect minds circumscribe the natural for him?

Consider the earth's motion, its revolution upon its axis, and in its orbit, 92,000,000 miles from the sun; its rapidity of mo-

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tion, 554,000,000 miles per year, 1,500,000 per day. Natural. *62,640 per hr. 1,040 per min.*

Consider the seasons, summer and winter. Natural.

Consider the countless millions of worlds. Natural.

Consider life itself. Natural.

Consider the majesty of God's power, the sublimity of His wisdom, and then why should it be thought a thing incredible, (supernatural) that God should raise the dead?

The cross was raised, Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. All that human power could do was done to extinguish his name and his cause. But for the resurrection which shortly followed, doubtless that would have been the inevitable result, and the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers, for which the twelve tribes longed and prayed with such earnestness, would have been blotted out of the world's sacred history, and the New Testament would have remained unwritten.

Pause here at the tomb. Consider calmly the standing of Christ's cause when the closed and sealed sepulchre contained his mortal body. What a complete, fearful, and

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absolute overthrow, apparently. The Master dead, the disciples timid, helpless and disheartened. Their Christ a condemned blasphemer because He said He was God. His memory blighted by the withering curse of death by crucifixion. Condemned, too, as an enemy of Cæsar. They hoped for his resurrection at the last, the great day, but not until then. We must not judge them by our knowledge, but by their own. They knew not then the meaning of "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They had expected so much from their Master; how terrible must have been their disappointment.

If the centuries since then could be blotted out, and we brought to that tomb containing the dead body of Christ, before the stone had been rolled away, what terrible anguish it would bring, and we, too, would go silently and hopelessly to the secret gathering place of the disciples in Jerusalem to weep in despair, or, worse, to join the multitude in exultation over his apparent defeat.

If the finding of the Sanhedrim that he was a blaspheming imposter was correct, then it would be expected that this would

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be the end. But if the verdict was false, and he was the Messiah, then it was but the commencement of that true kingdom which he came to establish.

The subsequent conduct and teaching of the apostles and disciples can be accounted for on but three possible theories:

(1) That the resurrection was real. (2) That the resurrection did not take place, but that by hallucination the apostles and disciples believed it. (3) That the resurrection did not take place, and that the testimony of the apostles of the disciples was knowingly false.

The theory of hallucination is unworthy of discussion with sane men, for it would be worthy of a madman only to contend that such an hallucination could be possible with so many persons at the same time.

At the time of the ascension he lifted up his hands and blessed them, and it occurred that while he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven. Even at this time the question was asked, "Wilt thou at this time again restore the kingdom to Israel?" They continued still to expect an earthly kingdom; they were still impa-

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tient for elevation to thrones, and for temporal power, and to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. They then had no doubt as to the establishment of such a kingdom. The inquiry seeks only to know the time when it shall be established. This fact is important, tending to show strongly that they were not deceived in regard to the resurrection and ascension.

Before Jesus was arrested the disciples did not believe that he would die. They expected that he would reign on the earth forever. After his death they did not believe that he would immediately rise from the dead, because their confidence in him as the Messiah had been destroyed. They did not expect that he would ascend in bodily form from the earth. By his resurrection their faith in him was renewed, and their expectation of an earthly kingdom revived.

Nothing short of an ocular demonstration had convinced them that he was risen from the dead. Nothing short of ocular demonstration would convince them that he had taken his departure bodily from the earth. At the time of the ascension they

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were informed that it was not for them to know when their Messianic hopes were to be realized. They were directed not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait there for the revelation of the Father's will for them, and they were assured that they should receive power, and that, after the Holy Spirit had come upon them, they should be witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The Master did not choose that his disciples should commence their work until fully prepared; nor would he have them disperse and commence preaching each for himself, at a distance from Jerusalem, which was the natural thing for them to have done. Suspicion might be excited if they first proclaimed the resurrection of their Master at a distance from the place where it was alleged to have occurred. But in Jerusalem, where he had been condemned, mocked and buffeted; where his enemies were now triumphing and exulting in the conviction that they had utterly crushed him and his cause; in Jerusalem, within hearing of the Sanhedrin, and its following; at the seat of the Roman pro-

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curator; where that immense concourse of people was gathered, many of whom had doubtless witnessed his crucifixion and joined in the shouts of derision against him; where the rich and powerful Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, dwelt; where the best possible means and opportunity existed for the detection of imposture, had any been attempted; in Jerusalem he would have them remain, and after being empowered by the Holy Spirit, there he would have them commence their ministry, and give convincing and overwhelming testimony; there in the midst of all his powerful enemies he would have them *first* proclaim his *resurrection*, that the power of God might openly triumph, even in Jerusalem, over human power.

It was in Jerusalem, within fifty days after the resurrection, that Peter, even he who had denied his Master thrice,—his fellow apostles, all of them deserters, standing up as witnesses of its truth,—spoke for all of them those bold words, found in Acts 11:22 to 38.

And there were received and baptized that day three thousand converts to the

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truth; there and then the church started with the fundamental doctrine of the risen Lord, and on that solid foundation it has ever rested secure and sure of ultimate triumph.

From this time forward the annals of sacred and profane historians are in substantial accord upon the teaching, journeying and bravery of the apostles and disciples. Their persecutions and martyrdom are, alas, too well authenticated.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ may safely be said to be the most important doctrine of Christianity, it may be regarded as its corner stone; take this away and the whole system fails. At the time of the resurrection the fact that Jesus rose from the dead was sought to be overthrown by the allegation of the Roman guard, that while they slept the disciples came and stole the body of Jesus. Their testimony is worthless, because they show their necessary lack of knowledge upon the subject of how the body was removed, if they were sleeping when this act was performed.

On the other hand the apostles all asserted and ever maintained that Jesus was

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raised from the dead; that he was seen by them on several occasions, and after a time that he ascended from the earth into heaven. In proof they offered their personal testimony, then and always while they lived. Yea, more, they offered their whole life's service to this very cause, not only one of them, but all, and still further, they all died in and for the cause of Christ.

Were they competent and credible witnesses? If they were not deceived as to the facts, they were competent; if they did not intend to deceive others, they were credible; and if both competent and credible, their testimony is true, and it is abundant.

In regard to their competency, and the improbability of their being deceived, it should be observed that the state of their minds was such that they would not believe their Master had risen except upon the most conclusive evidence, each for himself.

Note these facts:

First. They expected he would establish an earthly kingdom.

Second. They did not believe that he would die, nor did they understand what he meant by being raised from the dead.

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Third. When he was apprehended and appeared to be in danger of death, their confidence in him was shaken and they forsook him and fled.

Fourth. When he was put to death their hopes in and through him were utterly crushed, and they manifested no expectation of further aid or benefit from him.

Fifth. As might be expected, they were reluctant to believe that he had been raised from the dead, to believe upon the testimony of others, but required the most positive and conclusive personal evidence before believing.

It cannot, therefore, be doubted that the apostles were competent witnesses, that is, that they were not deceived; that they had opportunity to know, and did know, whether their testimony was true, or whether it was false.

In regard to their credibility:

First. They had nothing to gain by testifying the resurrection of Jesus falsely, there was no motive for falsehood, for they knew that a life of poverty, toil, suffering and sorrow was before them if their testimony was false. They could not expect to be re-

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warded of God for claiming the resurrection of a false Messiah, and imposter.

Second. They had much to lose, for they thus exposed themselves to the fury of those who had crucified Jesus.

Third. Notwithstanding these circumstances they did openly proclaim the resurrection, shortly after it occurred, and first in Jerusalem, where they would excite the most attention, and where if it were a fraud it could easily have been detected.

Fourth. They all steadily persevered in their testimony of the resurrection, and although they differed sharply on other subjects they were all of one accord in maintaining that the Lord had risen.

Fifth. In and for this cause they endured imprisonment, afflictions and death, and sealed with their death the truth of their testimony.

Sixth. They did not, like others, suffer martyrdom in testimony that they were sincere in their professed opinions, but in attestation of the facts; they did not profess to believe that Jesus had risen, and offer their lives in proof of their sincerity, but they asserted that they had seen him alive

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after he had been crucified, and had conversed with him, touched him, seen him eat, and after having become absolutely certain of his personal identity had seen him ascend from the earth into heaven.

Seventh. The apostles had been timid, and fearful of their personal safety. Peter at least had adopted unjustifiable means to secure personal safety. In the short space of fifty days these Galileans had become fearless of personal danger. Nothing could terrify them; they were ready to encounter stripes, imprisonment and death. If they had stolen the body of Jesus, as charged, this act, certainly, would not have filled them with courage. The dead body concealed by them would not have given them more confidence and courage than they had at the time the Master was a prisoner in the hands of his enemies. But if they knew that he had risen, and had promised to be with them always, even to the end, then their boldness is readily accounted for; it was natural. The astonishing change produced in their minds and conduct cannot be accounted for on any other theory than that they knew their testimony was true.

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They were credible witnesses, that is, worthy of belief; their whole lives and their deaths were in thorough accord with their testimony. They gave the most convincing evidence possible of the truth of their evidence and of their honesty and sincerity.

Let it be remembered, also, that just so far as their honesty is proven, the truth of their testimony is proven; for with them it was not a matter of opinion, but a matter of fact. They knew the facts; they could not all testify falsely by mistake; they would not all testify falsely knowingly.

If the testimony of such men under such circumstances is not to be believed, then we may abandon at once all faith in human testimony. If their testimony was not true, then all human testimony is false; for it is impossible to imagine a case in which the witnesses should have more perfect knowledge, or give stronger proof of their honesty and sincerity.

And the immediate effect of the apostolic testimony and ministry in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and for years thereafter, shows rapid growth. Others then believed their words and works. Within about three

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centuries Christianity triumphed over all opposition and became the established religion of the Roman empire. And this vast accession of converts was made, not by force or persecution, but against powerful opposition, by the simple power of truth, enforced by faithfulness in the lives of its advocates.

The foregoing argument is submitted with the hope that it may have the same weight with others that it has had with the writer, leading to belief in Christianity as a divine religion.

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